

## DARCHAI NOAM

### Its ways are ways of pleasantness - דרכיה דרכי נעם

(Mishlei 3:17)

Vayigash, December 2015

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How can the Parsha help us grow this week?

### Vayigash – providing comfort

This week's Parsha of Vayigash culminates in a dramatic climax. Yosef's brothers have been sent from pillar to post by a 'crazy Egyptian ruler'. He has accused them of being spies, he imprisoned Shimon, he refused to see them if they didn't bring Binyamin with them, he entertained them with a feast and wine and then he threatened to keep Binyamin as a slave. There is no apparent logic to this behaviour. The brothers presume that they are somehow being punished for their treatment of Yosef many years ago. They know that their father Yaakov would be devastated if they go back to him without Binyamin. Yehuda valiantly defends Binyamin with an impassioned plea. He offers to take Binyamin's place in slavery.

Finally, the Egyptian ruler utters two words that explain everything:

*"אני יוסף – I am Yosef"* (Breishit 45:3)

In an instant, everything makes sense. The brothers cannot respond because of the shock and the shame.

The Chofetz Chaim compares Yosef's revelation to Hashem's future revelation at the End of Days<sup>1</sup>. The brothers were perplexed by the seemingly illogical suffering this ruler was causing them. So too, we often wonder at the suffering in this world. Why do the wicked prosper? Why do the righteous suffer? Yet, at the End of Days Hashem will reveal Himself to the world with two words: "Ani Hashem". Then everything will make sense.

There are no questions in the World to Come. Things don't make sense to us now due to our limited perspective. Our view from this world has been described as looking at the back a tapestry – a jumble of knotted string, a mess with no apparent logic. Only when we view the tapestry from the front does everything makes sense.

The story is told about one of the Ramban's students who was on his death bed. The Ramban visited his student and presented him with a number of serious questions about the affairs of the Jewish nation. His student was about to enter the world of truth where everything would be revealed. He asked his student to come back to him in a dream with the answers to his questions. The student did come back in a dream, but to the Ramban's disappointment he did not have any answers. The student explained that when he arrived in the World to Come and wanted to present the questions, there were no questions to ask. In the world of truth everything is just and righteous and everything makes sense.<sup>2</sup>

Each of us has some pretty big questions about our personal suffering or global suffering. There are many events that do not seem 'good' in any way. Yet, they are sent by a loving Father who is merciful and kind. How can this be? We can achieve some level of comfort by realising that answers do exist, we just don't understand them at the moment.

<sup>1</sup> This idea is brought by many commentators and it seems to be based on the Midrash. Interestingly, the Avnei Shoham points out that the phrase "Ani Hashem" appears in the haftarah for this week's Parsha (Yechezkel 37:28).

<sup>2</sup> Brought in Yalkut Me'am Lo'ez (Parshat Shoftim)

*"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways," says Hashem.*  
(Yeshayahu 55:8)

We can hopefully use this approach to achieve comfort for ourselves.

But what about comforting others if they are suffering? Is it appropriate to philosophise or to try to justify their pain?

The book of Iyov (Job) tackles the difficult question of how to respond to suffering. Iyov was righteous and tremendously successful. But it all came crashing down. He suffered indescribable torment, and lost almost everything that he had. Three good friends came to visit him and tried to comfort him. The friends tried their best to come up with the right words but they fail dismally. "It's all for the best", "you need to examine your behaviour", "you must have done something wrong to deserve this suffering". Even if their message is correct, their timing is wrong. Hashem Himself is angry at Iyov's friends for the words that they say to Iyov<sup>3</sup>. A time of suffering is not the appropriate time to educate. Afterwards, when the suffering has passed, and if the person is ready, it might be a time to philosophise. That is why, when we visit a house of mourning we should not initiate the discussion. Rather, we should wait for the mourner to speak, if and when they choose to do so.

Once, Rav Moshe Feinstein went on a long drive to visit a house of mourning. He arrived and sat silently in the room of the person sitting shiva. The mourner did not say a word and neither did the Rav. After sitting in silence for quite some time Rav Moshe got up and recited the traditional phrase of comfort. Then he left. On the way back home his driver commented that after such a long drive the visit seems to have been a waste of time. Rav Moshe responded: "We have no idea how much comfort the mourner received just by sitting with him there in the room".

When someone is in the midst of suffering, the best approach can often be to just be there with them and share in their pain. Rebbetzin Esther Jungreis tells the following story about her late husband, Rabbi Theodore Jungreis. Rebbetzin Jungreis met a person who had recently finished sitting shiva. The bereaved could not stop raving about the comfort that Rabbi Jungreis had provided. Out of all of the visitors to the house of mourning, Rabbi Jungreis was most able to help him come to terms with his loss. Rebbetzin Jungreis was intrigued. Comforting a mourner is always challenging. She wanted to know her husband's secret. What did he say that had such a profound effect? She asked her husband to reveal what had happened at the house of mourning. Rabbi Jungreis shrugged. He didn't say anything special. He just felt the mourner's pain so strongly. All he could do was hug him and cry.

Let's try something this week:

1. When we suffer or face hardships, try to remember that there is a reason. Hashem is perfectly fair and just. We should use the suffering as an impetus to examine our deeds and see where we can improve.
2. When those around us are suffering, our approach needs to be the exact opposite. We should not philosophise or rebuke. The best approach is often just to be there and share their pain.

Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi Ledder.

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<sup>3</sup> Iyov 42:7.

## **About Darchai Noam**

The passuk in Mishlei (3:17) describes the Torah as follows: "Its ways are ways of pleasantness (Darchai Noam) and all its paths are peace". The Torah is our guidebook for life. It is packed full of good advice as to how we should live our lives.

The aim of the Darchai Noam weekly email is to examine an idea from the weekly parashah that usually relates to good middot (character traits). It will focus particularly on treating each other with respect and how to interact with each other in a more peaceful and pleasant manner. It will also suggest some practical tips for implementing these ideas in our daily lives.

By learning together each week, and making an effort to regularly put the ideas into practice, with Hashem's help we can all gradually improve our character traits and our observance of 'v'ahavta l'reiacha kamocho' – loving one's fellow as oneself.

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